

Analysis of Huizhou's Ancient Village Construction Based on the Concept of Harmonious Co-Existence

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Abstract

The concept of "symbiosis" originated in biology, primarily describing the relationship between two distinct organisms that coexist and interact with each other. This concept was later adopted in the fields of sociology and architecture. In Jenks' "symbiosis view," he argued that architecture should remain connected to the organic whole of the universe, the historical context of the city, and the natural environment. He posited that designs restricted to the designer's emotional imagination or pure rationality would eventually be discarded by society. This paper uses the concept of symbiosis as a foundation to conduct an in-depth analysis of the harmonious symbiosis reflected in the ancient villages of Huizhou. The paper first elaborates on the definition of symbiosis and its related theories, and then analyzes how the concept of symbiosis is expressed in the ancient villages of Huizhou, offering insights for future rural reconstruction.

Keywords

Harmonious coexistence; Huizhou Ancient Villages; Building concept; Ecological spirit.

1. Introduction

Hui culture has long been recognized as one of the three major regional cultures in China, with the ancient villages of Huizhou serving as its most tangible embodiment. These villages, often referred to as "the epitome of Chinese traditional culture" and "the artistic treasure house of ancient oriental architecture," represent a valuable legacy from our ancestors. The principles embedded in these villages not only account for ecological factors but also harmonize with local cultural needs, aligning closely with the concept of "symbiosis".

2. Overview of the Symbiosis Concept

2.1. The basic meaning of "symbiosis"

The term "symbiosis" originates from biology, where "co-existence" is fundamental, and "life" represents the state of formation, indicating that two different species coexist in the same environment. It generally describes the relationship between two or more different interacting species, including parasitism, mutualism, and commensalism. In a broader sense, "symbiosis" later came to refer to the mutually beneficial relationship between different species, where each species gains advantages.

2.2. The Proposition of "Symbiosis Concept"

The concept of symbiosis emerged alongside the idea of "survival of the fittest" in Darwin's theory of evolution and was formally developed as humans began to cohabit and cooperate. It emphasizes the coexistence and participation of diverse species, interacting to create new forms. The concept of symbiosis is generally understood as an interdependent and harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Symbiosis is essential for the survival of human

society. Human existence and development are reflected in society by meeting the needs of others, thereby forming a symbiotic relationship between humans, nature, and society.

2.3. The Architectural "Symbiosis View"

The concept of symbiosis is also evident in the field of architecture. Architecture often serves as a medium. Its full value is realized only when it forms a harmonious relationship with people, society, and the natural environment. In response to the homogeneous and monotonous state of modern architecture, Jencks introduced the "symbiosis view" in the architectural field. Architecture should not merely pursue individualism or formalism; symbiotic architecture must communicate effectively with individual life and its context, and establish meaningful connections with urban society. This dual code of architecture demands the integration of new technology with traditional forms, maintaining both functionality and aesthetic appeal while harmonizing with nature. Here, the term "nature" encompasses not only the natural environment but also the cultural and social environment, with the ancient villages of Huizhou being among the best manifestations of this concept, see [Figure 1](#).

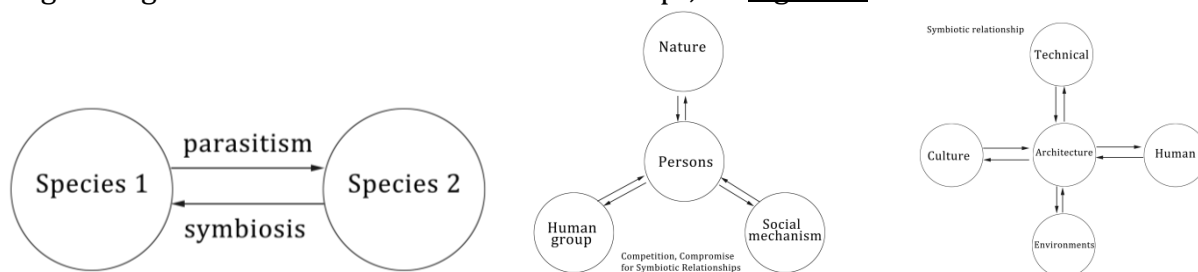


Figure 1: Symbiotic relationship among biological category, human society category and architectural category

3. General Overview of Huizhou villages

3.1. Physical and Geographical Conditions

Huizhou is situated in the southern part of Anhui Province, an area rich in natural resources and landscapes, characterized by numerous rivers and mountains, which facilitated the development of villages. Huizhou is situated in the southern part of Anhui Province, an area rich in natural resources and landscapes, characterized by numerous rivers and mountains, which facilitated the development of villages [1]. The early villages primarily consisted of scattered small communities. After the Song Dynasty, central migration led to the formation of more structured villages. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the development of villages reached its peak. Today, after thousands of years of weathering and change, the ancient villages have largely retained their integrity, demonstrating their remarkable adaptability. [2]

3.2. The Value of the Village

The ancient villages of Huizhou have long been regarded as "living fossils" of Hui culture and are considered the most authentic living museums of this cultural heritage. The formation of these villages reflects traditional Chinese creative thought, particularly influenced by the Feng Shui principles of Yi-ology; Additionally, the ancient villages contain numerous dwellings, furniture, decorations, ancestral halls, documents, and other artifacts, offering rich materials and examples for the study of traditional aesthetics [3]. Moreover, while the ancient villages of Huizhou are products of regional culture, they transcend this value. Historically, immigrants from the Central Plains brought advanced productivity to the original villages and infused them with new cultural elements. Along with the rise of Hui merchants and the influence of Neo-

Confucianism, Hui culture underwent fundamental transformations. In this sense, the ancient villages have transcended the boundaries of mere regional culture.

4. Analysis of the Mechanisms Behind the Formation of Ideas

4.1. Safety and Ideals

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety is one of the most fundamental requirements. Higher-level needs become relevant only after one's personal safety is secured. The formation of ancient villages was closely tied to the ancient people's need for safety. Ancient people sought out Huizhou, a geomantic treasure, to escape the ravages of war. The area is characterized by suitable valleys and basins, with terrain that is easy to defend and difficult to attack. The surrounding contour lines create a natural embrace, fostering a strong sense of security and belonging. Additionally, the villagers fully utilized this sense of security to build their villages, designing ideal homes in harmony with the terrain, thereby deeply implementing the concept of harmony and security. In ancient times, when scientific and technological development was limited, people's understanding of the world was relatively narrow, leading to a deep respect and awe for nature, which in turn made the construction of villages highly attuned to the natural ecology. People have long pursued and yearned for nature's protection, conforming to it significantly in village construction, with the hope of achieving harmony between heaven and humanity, which also increased the role of "Feng Shui theory" in village design[4].

4.2. Ecological Protection and Aesthetic Considerations

Given the emphasis on "feng shui theory" in village construction, villagers believe that every plant and tree in the Huizhou area is closely linked to people's destinies, and this belief is reflected in all aspects of life. Many local regulations explicitly prohibit resource extraction and deforestation. The lush vegetation signifies the vitality and excellence of the local people, reflecting traditional Huizhou ethics that emphasize aligning personal fortunes with nature[5]. This practice contributes to making Huizhou villages ideal places to live. Additionally, aesthetic considerations are a key factor in the development of the concept of symbiosis in Huizhou villages. Traditional ethics views beauty as harmony, envisioning the ideal home as a harmonious, beautiful, and poetic space where people, nature, and society are in equilibrium. Under the influence of feng shui theory, Huizhou villages exhibit a balanced and symmetrical layout, set against a backdrop of mountains and water. The surrounding mountains are appropriately scaled and harmonized with the village buildings, reflecting a naturalistic approach that meets the aesthetic needs of the ancients.

5. The Concept of Symbiosis with Nature

5.1. Site Selection and Planning for Villages

Driven by the pursuit of "harmony between man and nature" and the concept of balance, as well as the desire for geomantic treasures, Huizhou's location is highly satisfactory due to its favorable yin-yang balance and proximity to mountains and rivers. Feng Shui experts of that time believed that "when the wind rides, the air gathers, while the boundary water stops," making the area with back mountain and surface water ideal for air accumulation. The surrounding mountains effectively block cold currents, while the basin plain allows for ample sunshine, providing essential living resources[6]. The flowing water softens spatial boundaries, enhancing the overall softness and beauty of the environment. As Zhuangzi remarked, "Heaven and earth possess immense beauty without proclaiming it, and while there are clear laws, there is injustice in the four seasons." The natural landscape of Huizhou and its village layout complement and interact with each other, resulting in a cohesive and organic beauty.

5.2. Village Layout

Huizhou folk sayings like "Xiuning Snake, Qimen Monkey" are derived from the terrain of the villages, which are meticulously planned and designed with symbolic forms. Visually, village layouts can be broadly categorized into three types: animal motifs, plant motifs, and object motifs. The most notable example of an animal motif village is Hongcun, where Leigang Mountain represents its head and the ancient bridge serves as its feet, creating a vivid likeness to a buffalo resting in a picturesque setting. Villages designed with plant motifs often feature various flowers symbolizing auspicious meanings. For instance, Xuli Village in the Song Dynasty is modeled after lotus flowers, reflecting the villagers' reverence for nature [7]. Additionally, abstract motifs are employed in village layouts. For example, Chengkan Village, renowned as a prime example of feng shui, utilizes landscape topography arranged according to the Eight Diagrams. This design embodies the principles of yin-yang integration and harmony between humanity and nature, achieving a seamless integration of village architecture and landscape, see [Picture 2](#).



Figure 2: Bionic form of Hongcun, Chengkan Village and Xiaoqi Village

5.3. The Landscape of Shuikou in Villages

Villagers place significant importance on water resources. "Shuikou is the source of all water." As the gateway of ancient villages, Shuikou symbolizes the entire village and is crucial to its prosperity or decline. On one hand, the Shuikou in Huizhou villages serves functions such as flood control and water diversion. It also symbolizes the village's location and fulfills the psychological need for seeking benefits and avoiding disadvantages [8]. Most water outlets in the village are designed to blend seamlessly with the natural landscape and topography, adapting to local conditions without harming the environment. This approach exemplifies the harmonious coexistence with nature central to village construction.

6. The Concept of Social and Humanistic Harmony

6.1. Human-Centric Adaptation of Nature

Due to the numerous rivers in the Huizhou region, some areas experience either excessive or insufficient water. This variability in natural resources necessitates human intervention. Villagers have implemented measures such as "diverting ditches" and "digging ponds to store water." A notable example is Hongcun, which involved creating moon ponds during the Ming Dynasty and opening South Lake during the Wanli period to both ward off evil spirits and store water. These measures not only mitigate rapid water flow but also help prevent floods [9]. These measures integrate natural and artificial water systems, fostering the healthy and orderly development of villages and providing residents with a well-maintained and aesthetically pleasing environment.

6.2. Integration of Technical Materials with Nature

Village architecture is designed in accordance with the local climate and environment, optimizing light and ventilation, and addressing fire prevention, moisture control, and pest management. This approach emphasizes the need for human activities to harmonize with the

broader natural environment. Concerning village materials, there is a strong emphasis on prioritizing natural resources by utilizing locally available materials such as bamboo, wood, and masonry. For residential foundations, masonry or concrete mixed with wild rattan juice is employed, offering both strength and pest resistance. Additionally, indoor surfaces are coated with a mixture of soil and lime to prevent termite infestation. Villagers employ porcelain altars filled with lime and charcoal to mitigate moisture [10]. After drying, wood is coated with turpentine and assembled using mortise and tenon joints, which not only extends the material's lifespan but also conserves wood and facilitates reuse. In ancient times, when technology was less advanced, these methods were highly innovative and contributed to a more harmonious village life.

7. Conclusion

Ancestors viewed residence as fundamental to human existence. This perspective is reflected in every aspect of Huizhou's ancient villages, from site selection to layout and architectural details, showcasing their unique features and profound cultural significance, which continues to be recognized globally. Several villages in Huizhou have been designated as World Cultural Heritage sites. Studying their deep connotations and values is essential for the effective preservation of these heritage sites. Concurrently, China is advancing the development and transformation of rural areas. Examining the principles behind Huizhou's ancient village construction offers valuable insights for the development of other rural areas, facilitating the preservation and evolution of this cultural heritage.

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